


# NINE PRECIOUS GEMS OF VEDIC THOUGHT

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The sacred and magnificent Vedic heritage has been bequeathed to us by the great rishis as a timeless gift for the whole humanity. India is privileged and proud to give this gift to the whole world. Rigved is the first book (aadigranth) of human race. Even ancient samskrit works describe Ved as already existing and accept its authority. Hence, Ved is the blessed mother of other sister religions and primary source of dharma (*Vedo-akhilo dharmamoolam. Manusmriti, 2:6*). It is the sacred source of Indian culture, philosophy, science and thought process and supreme authority on matters of Hindu law (*Pramaanam paramam shrutih. Manusmriti, 2:13*). Vedic teachings are based on universal and divine cosmic laws (rita) and eternal truths (satya) (*Ritam cha satyanchaabheedhaat tapaso-adhyajaayat. Rigved, 10:190:1*). Being at once most ancient and the most modern thought process, Vedic dharma has stood rational thinking and scientific enquiry. Hence, its validity is eternal (nitya) and for all times and nations (sarvabhoom). Vedic truth like all truth belongs not just to India but to the whole humanity because it belongs to the Lord. The emphasis is on one God (*Ekam sadvipraa bahudhaa vadanti. Rigved, 1:164:46*) and one global family (*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*) and not on one prophet or personality. Being poetry of the Divine, the mystical Vedic truths have deep and esoteric symbolic meaning. These truths were revealed to rishis who were mystic seers (mantr-drishhta). Samskrit, the language of Ved and Devanaagri, its script are of revered antiquity and scientifically, psychologically and phonetically perfect. This reflects the magnificent genius of Vedic rishis who were realized yogis and peaks of humanity. Samskrit can be an ideal international language in which Rigved, Yajurved, Saamaved and Atharvaved were revealed to great rishis Agni, Vayu, Surya (or Aditya) and Angira (*Agnerigvedo vaayoryajurvedah suryaatsaamavedah. Shatpathbraahman, 11:4:2:3*). It is the marvel of Shruti that it remained the same over millennia and continues to shine in spite of centuries of repetitive invasions, plunder and brutal suppression of Indian culture and science. Today, hedonism, terrorism and the possibility of all-destructive nuclear war are posing a great threat to the human race. World needs resurgent India and its spiritual Vedic wisdom as never before.

Vedic India was on top of the world in every sphere of human life. People from other countries used to study various subjects in our universities like Nalanda, Takshila and Sharada. Destiny dictates that we again play a crucial role in the global family and lead the world in spirit and science; in thought, word and deed. For that, we need our ancient Bharat and modern India to surge ahead in unison. If we take inspiration from our cultural heritage, India will move to become a leading global player in a few decades. The myths and imperialist dogmas popularized during the centuries of alien rule need to be demolished and the "Wonder that was India" reclaimed and re-established. Let there be rebirth of Indian nation and re-education of whole human race. To achieve this noble goal, Vedic culture and yoga must be included in our "modern" education. Let us encourage indigenous scholarship, break free from the colonized mindset and popularize Vedic knowledge. This paper gives a brief account of nine precious gems culled from the unfathomable Vedic literature.

**1. Paramatma as transcendental and immanent Godhead:** The all-pervading omnipresent (sarvavyaapak), omniscient (sarvajnya) and omnipotent (sarvashaktimaan) Paramatma who is one and without a second (*Na dviteeyo na triteeyashchaturtho naapyuchyate. Atharvaved, 13:4:16*) is at the center of Vedic teaching and philosophy. In semitic religions, God the father is in the heaven above. Lord Jesus says in the Bible (Matthew, 12:50), "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother". On the other hand, Vedic verses emphasize that one God pervades this whole creation and He is in every one of us. The very opening verse of Isha Upanishad states thus: "Almighty Lord, the Supreme Soul pervades this whole universe. Enjoy this world with detachment and do not covet the wealth of others (*Ishaa vaasyamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyaam jagat. Ishopanishad, 1; also Yajurved, 40:1*). Paramatma is immanent as well as transcendental, within this vast creation as well as outside, far beyond it. The absolute is beyond our conceptual power. Moreover, the Divine is in all of us and it is easier to think of Him as an immanent reality, in form and symbols. Hence, Hindus commonly worship God as form, as an embodiment. This is the basis of so-called "Hindu polytheism". Vedic verses emphasize the oneness and unchangeableness of God. Rigved states thus: "God as truth is one and the wise call Him by many names like Indra, Mitra, Varun, Agni, Yam and Maatarishvaa (*Indram mitram varunam agni ---- ekam sadvipraa bahudhaa vadanti. Rigved, 1:164:46*) The ONE has many names, each having a philosophical meaning and expressing one or more of His qualities. He is Brahma, the creator and the greatest; Vishnu, the worship-worthy and omnipresent; Shiv, the auspicious and benevolent; Agni, the self-luminous; Vayu, our life breath and all powerful. As our mother, father and friend, He is our dear and lovable protector. This is distinct from the concept of "God fearing" and "Our Father in the heaven" concept of semitic religions. Vedic God is not the "Father" with a long, snow-white beard sitting on a big throne. He is beyond gender and is addressed by the neutral term "That" (e.g. "Tat" in the celebrated Gaayatri mantra) as well as motherly names such as Shakti, the creative power; Saraswati, the repository of all knowledge and Lakshmi, the lakshya (goal) of yogis and devotees. In Yoga Darshan, Maharishi Patanjali describes Him as the Guru of all gurus (*Sa esh poorveshaamapi guruh kaalenanavachhedaat. Yoga Darshan, 1:26*). Vedic verses describe Him as omnipresent (*Tadejati...tadu sarvasyaasya baahyatah. Yajurved, 40:5*), formless (*Akaayam. Yajurved, 40:8*), One having many names (*Ekam sadvipraa bahudhaa vadanti. Rigved, 1:164:46; Tadeva agni tad aditya tad vayu. Yajurved, 32:1*) and capable of performing all the actions without gross organs (*Apaanipaado javano graheetaa. Shvetaashvatar Upanishad, 3:19*). Kathopanishad describes Him as finer than the finest, greater than the greatest, all pervading and existing in our innermost heart and soul (*Anoraniyaan mahato maheeyaan. Kathopanishad, 1:2:20*). We can experience Him in our heart and soul in meditation. He is ultimate in Truth-Goodness-Beauty (Satyam-Shivam-Sundaram) and Being-Intelligence-Bliss (Sat-Chit-Anand). By singing His glories and meditating on His attributes, we gradually absorb these divine qualities and acquire divine personality and inner joy. Realising the divinity within, we perceive the same divinity in His whole creation and in every one. In the beautiful words of Yogeshvar Krishna, "The yogi's consciousness is united with the universal consciousness and he sees unity everywhere, beholding self in all beings and all beings in self (*Sarvabhootasthamaatmaanam sarvabhootaani chaatmani. Bhagavadgita, 6:29*). Vedic approach is non-sectarian. For the Divine communion, no intermediary or mediator is essential. This is in contrast to the Bible (John, 14:6) where Lord Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me".

**2.  he mantra of mantras:** Aum (Om), the symbol of the Divine is the essence of Vedas and mantra of mantras. It has been beautifully described as

“signature of the Divine”. Also called as pranav, it is used in the beginning of Vedic verses and all sacred ceremonies and activities. For Hindus, it is the holiest of holy words and the most important and sacred symbol. Hinduism may well be called as “Om-theism” that is centered around Om and belief in Paramatma that is Omnipresent, Om-niscient and Om-nipotent. Aum is sacred to Sikhs as “Ek Omkar” and to Tibetan Buddhists as “Hum”. “Amen” of Jews and Christians and “Amin” of Muslims sound very much like Aum. Thus Aum is virtually a universal invocation, a most profound, short, complete and sweet vibratory sound and mantra of mantras.

The Holy Bible (John, 1:1) says that “In the beginning was the Word (?Aum) and the Word was with God and the Word was God”. This is similar to Bhagavadgita where Yogeshwar Krishna describes the creative power of Aum at the cosmic dawn, i.e. beginning of the creation (*Om-tat-sad iti nirdesho.... vihitaah puraa. Bhagavadgita, 17:23*). The very opening verse of Mandukya Upanishad describes Aum as the best name of God that encompasses the whole, whether past, present or future (*Om ityetadaksharamidam sarvam. Mandukya Upanishad,1*). It represents the undifferentiated, indivisible and infinite Brahman. Aum has been described as the best symbol and the most esteemable name of God because it includes His many qualities (*Omiti brahm. Omiteedam sarvam.Taittiriya Upanishad, 8*). The attributes of the Divine are limitless and beyond the expressive power of any language. The three letters of Aum represent different names and attributes of the Divine. For example, “A” stands for Agni, Vishva, Virat etc, “U” for Vayu, Tejas etc, and “M” for Ishvar, Aditya etc. The three letters have also been associated with the three stages of creation, preservation and dissolution and Satyam–Shivam–Sundaram and Sat–Chit–Anand, the attribute - triad of the Divine.

Sound and music have psychophysiological and therapeutic effects. Devotional, soft music calms the mind and jaded nerves. Fast beats can have stimulatory effect. Divine name / mantra has great power when we chant and reflect upon its meaning with dedication and faith. Then japa develops into dhyaan and the mantra has materialising power. Mantra is a potent vibratory chant and an instrument of thought. Being sacred, it should be pronounced correctly for its beneficial vibratory potency. Aum is the most sacred and powerful mantra. It is the best and most suitable name of God whom all Ved glorify (*Sarve Vedaa yatpadamaamananti. Katha Upanishad, 1:2:15*), is capable of fulfilling all the desires (*Yo yadichhati tasya tat. Katha Upanishad, 1:2:16*) and support of which elevates us spiritually (*Etadaalambanam jnaatvaa brahmaloke maheeyate. Katha Upanishad, 1:2:17*). AUM is compared to the bow, which helps our soul (arrow) to reach the Supreme Being (target) (*Pranavo dhanuh sharo. Mundak Upanishad, 2:2:4*). According to Patanjali, Pranav or Aum is the symbol of God (*Tasya vaachakah pranavah. Yoga Darshan, 1:27*) and doing japa on AUM with devotion removes obstacles and leads to spiritual awakening (*Tatah pratyakchetanaadhigamo apyantaraayabhaavashcha. Yoga Darshan, 1:29*). In pranav pranayam, chanting of Aum is linked with pranayam breathing in a complete vibratory chant starting from the basic abdominal sound Aaaa... through Uuuu.... to the final cerebral Mmmm... . This all-encompassing and vibratory sound has energising, calming, elevating and healing effect on the practitioner. It is clear that Aum has great significance from yogic and Vedic point of view. That is why Yogeshwar Krishna says, “I am sacred Aum in all the Vedas (*Pranavah sarvavedeshu. Bhagavadgita, 7:8*), Aum the purifier and worth knowing (*Vedyam pavitram omkar. Bhagavatgita, 9:17*) which should be recited at the commencement of all the sacred acts like yajna, charity and austerities (*Tasmaad om ityudaahritya yajna daan tapah kriyaah. Bhagavadgita, 17:24*).

**3. Eternal atma or soul:** Atheistic traditions like Charvaak of ancient India and communism do not accept the existence of atma. On the other hand, religious traditions believe in the existence of atma as an entity distinct from mind and body.

Mind is material as it evolves from prakriti, whereas soul is non-material and not the result of evolution. From the Vedic point of view, there are infinite number of atmas or individual souls as distinct from one Paramatma, the Universal Soul. Like Paramatma, atma is eternal, i.e. birthless and deathless, hence ever-existent and indestructible. Unlike Paramatma, the knowledge, power and attributes of atma are limited. Yogeshwar Krishna says thus: "The Soul is never born nor dies. It is eternal, everlasting and ancient. When body is slain, soul is not" (*Na jaayate mriyate vaa kadaachin. Bhagavadgita, 2:20*). This is in contrast to the Holy Bible (Acts, 3: 23), which says that "Every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed". Atma is subtle and pervades our mind-body complex, using it as an instrument. Being subtler, Paramatma pervades atma. Therefore, in a way, atma is inseparable from Paramatma. Our inner voice or conscience that enables us to differentiate between right and wrong points to the existence of atma and Paramatma within us. Being subtle, atma has great potentialities and powers. In this age of science and materialism, power of atma is a great hope as it can enable us to overcome the hedonistic tendencies and ennoble our lives.

Transmigration of atma and rebirth are distinct features of Vedic thought. Our present life is one link in a never-ceasing chain of births and deaths. Birth is union of atma with body whereas death is dissolution of that link. Birth and death are of body, not of atma. The purpose of birth is for atma to i) manifest some special attributes of the Divine

ii) work out the previous karma and iii) evolve on the path to liberation. Since Paramatma has given us discrimination and free will, atma has freedom to work and discharge duties (karma). However, we have no choice in the results of our actions (karma-phal) and have to reap the results of our actions according to Divine cosmic laws. According to Vedic teachings, same atma and same Divinity is in all of us and we belong to one human race. Therefore, in the words of Rigved, "Let us proceed with similar intentions, with hearts and minds similar to each other (*Samaani va aakutih samaanaa hridayaani vah. Rigved, 10:191:4*). In a beautiful example, Atharva Ved tells us to love each other just as a mother cow loves her newborn calf since Parmatma has created us with similar mind and without enmity (*Sahridayam saamanasyam avidvesham krinomi vah. Athrva Ved, 3:30:1*).

**4. Eternal prakriti or matter:** Paramatma is the sovereign cause and prakriti (primordial matter) the material cause of this creation. Like Paramatma and atma, prakriti is real and eternal. Vedas never say that it is false or an illusion. On the other hand, Vedas inculcate reverence for nature and natural phenomena. This beautiful and grand creation is an expression of power and glory of the Creator. It is real and sacred because it is the Divine karma of the Creator who pervades it. (*Ishaavaasyam idam sarvam. Yajurved, 40:1; Sa paryyagaat. Yajurved, 40:8*). It is here that jivatmas work out their karma, evolve spiritually and realise Divinity. Sat-Chit-Anand Paramatma is the ultimate source of anand (joy) and love. Hence, His plan for this creation is rooted in love. Nature and natural phenomena are simply beautiful and source of joy. The more we are in tune with nature and in touch with its elements, the happier and healthier we are. Prakriti is devoid of consciousness and feeling and is subject to change. It consists of panchabhoot or 5 elements (earth, water, air, heat and space) and is characterised by 3 gunas (satva, rajas and tamas). Prakriti is characterised by polarity, and duality of maya. Atoms are made of electrons and protons, which are electrical opposites. Day and night, flow and ebb, creation and dissolution are characteristic of this universe. From minute atom to the vast galaxies, there is an order and unity of purpose as prakriti is governed by cosmic laws (rita). These are i) natural laws that operate in the outer universe and discovered by science and ii) subtle laws that rule the spiritual planes and inner realms of consciousness and knowable through yoga and spirituality. Whether we are

deciphering subatomic levels or planning landing on the planets, these laws are inviolable.

We have evolved over the millennia under the influence of these laws. Our body is made of the elements of nature and matter is the very basis of our life. Hence, we are subject to and governed by the laws of nature. We are integral parts and participants, not masters of this creation. Unfortunately, in science, our relation with nature is like that between an arrogant master and his servant. Modern development has been associated with environmental degradation. United states, the most advanced and prosperous nation is the most polluter. In the Holy Bible (Genesis, 1: 28), God said to the first man and woman: "Multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth". We need to inculcate respect for nature and stop indiscriminate, illogical and selfish exploitation of natural resources for short-term gain. Otherwise, we will have to face ecological disaster due to global warming, rising seas and submerging cities and destructive droughts, famine and lack of drinking water. We cannot act like the demon Bhasmasur, who like the dinosaurs, devoured everything and ultimately destroyed himself. We must have a long-term organic and spiritual relationship with our mother earth and nature and use science, technology and spiritual knowledge with wisdom and responsibility. Cosmic law (rit) cannot be stayed or changed. We have to put ourselves in harmony with it and strive for ecological balance and healthy environment.

It is interesting to note that in Bhagavadgita, Yogeshwar Krishna shows His universal form (vishvaroop) to Arjun and repeatedly identifies Himself with this entire creation. The Lord says, "Earth, water, air, energy, space, mind, reason and ego constitute my nature. I am sapidity in water, light of moon and sun, sacred Aum of the Vedas, sound in the atmosphere and manliness in men (Bhagavadgita, 7: 4,8)". The Lord further says, " I am universal Self in the heart of all beings, ocean among the waters, Himalaya among the immovables, ashvath (holy fig) among the trees, lion among the quadrupeds and garuda among the birds (Bhagavadgita, 10: 20, 24, 25, 26, 30)". This entire creation is karma of the Divine who pervades it. By emphasizing its sacredness, Bhagavadgita (which is the essence of Upanishads and Vedas) inculcates in us respect for environment and ecology, the burning issues of our times. For holistic, integral development and progress, we need spiritual as well as material science. God is real and real is His creation, this material world. Dharma implies all-around worldly progress (abhyudaya) as well as inner, spiritual development (nih-shreyas). Ved says that one who knows both material and spiritual science can get over the mortal world by material science and attain final salvation and bliss by spiritual science (*Vinaashena mrityum teertvaa sambhootyaa amritamashnute. Yajurved, 40:14*). As seekers of liberation, we have to know Paramatma, our own atma as well as prakriti and none of these can be ignored.

**5. Universal outlook:** In the previous section, we have described the universal form (vishvaroop) of Yogeshwar Krishna. In Vedas, the word vishva (universal) is used frequently. Vedic principles that are universal and timeless truths need to be emphasized. Vedic concept is that one Paramatma pervades this whole creation and is resident force in it (*Ishaavaasyam idam sarvam. Isha Upanishad,1; Tadejati tannaijati. Yajurved, 40:5; Sa paryyagaat. Yajurved, 40:8*). This is distinct from "Our Father in the heaven above" concept of Semitic religions. Divine laws (rit) that regulate this creation operate universally, at all times. The concept that all human beings belong to one race and this whole world is one family (*vasudhaiv kutumbakam*) is epitome of human values and highly relevant in this age of globalization and information technology. Being children of immortality (*Shrinvantu vishve amritasya putraa. Shvetashvatar Upanishad, 2:5*), our kinship with Paramatma and through Him with every human being is deep rooted and sacred.

The spiritual science of yoga is non-sectarian and for the whole humanity. During meditation, yogi experiences union with all-pervading Paramatma and seeing unity everywhere beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self (*Sarvabhootasthamaatmaanam. Bhagavadgita, 6:29*). Such a yogi is boon to the society as he respects, loves and elevates others, thus fulfilling the Vedic mission of making the whole world noble (*Krinvanto vishvamaaryam Rigved, 9:63:5*). The mission is not to conquer the world for religious, political or economic purpose but to make all people noble (arya).

These Vedic concepts must be highlighted because they can promote responsible behaviour, universal brotherhood and lasting world peace. Terrorism is a worldwide threat since fanatics have sown carnage all over the world. The call for jihad is rising even in the streets of Europe, glorifying September 11 hijackers and Osama Bin Laden. If a terrorist group gets a nuclear weapon, we may see nuclear "9/11" and death and destruction of unprecedented magnitude. The lifeline of terrorism is dogma, fanaticism and the consequent narrow mindedness. At present, we are dealing with terrorism by the hardware of counter-terrorism measures. It needs to be emphasized that the most effective way to deal with the problem is long-term ideological response. Universal human values taught by Vedas can be used as effective software to deal with this scourge of our times and promote universal integration and peace.

**6. Vedic Dharma:** Vedic Dharma or Sanaatan (eternal) dharma is a living philosophy of India since prehistoric times. Present day Hinduism is based on Vedic dharma. Dharma implies belief in a higher power and consequent behavior and actions. It includes basic morality, righteousness and performance of duties. In English speaking world, dharma is commonly misunderstood with and taken synonymously with religion. That is not true because dharma is **not** religion. Religion is a definite belief system that leads to rituals and a particular mode of worship. Many dogmas are taken for granted even if they can neither be experienced nor proved. Dharma is none of this. Dharma is performance of duties, not rituals. Doing one's duty without any selfish motive and offering its results to the Divine is nishkaam karmayoga, the central message of Bhagavad Gita (2: 47, 3:22, 4:14, 5:10, 9:27,12:12). In the Holy Bible (John, 14:6), the Lord Jesus says, "I am the way... No one comes to Father except through Me". In Islam, for the goal of achieving heaven, faith in Prophet Mohammed is essential.

The exclusive and conclusive religious systems based on one prophet and a particular belief system and mode of worship divides. On the other hand, spirituality unites. When God is one and we are all his enlightened children, then why should we entertain dogma and narrow mindedness? In fact, Vedas do not advocate any religion but eternal truths that are universal and open to every human being. According to Manu, the ten characteristics of dharma (*Dashakam dharmalakshanam. Manusmriti, 6: 92*) are

i) steadfastness ii) forgiveness iii) mind control iv) not to steal v) purity vi) control of senses vii) cultivation of intellect viii) knowledge ix) truthfulness and x) control of anger. Yoga Darshan (2:29,30,32), which is one of the six schools of Hindu philosophy, lists five moral values (yama) and five personal disciplines (niyama) as the first two limbs (i.e., the very basis) of yogic discipline. Vaisheshik dharshana (1:1:2) states that dharma is that which leads to all round success in noble worldly pursuits as well as spiritual progress (*Yato abhyudaya nihshreyasa siddhih sa dharmah.*). Vedic lore has a holistic approach to our worldly and spiritual needs. Vedic Dharma is not a sectarian belief or ritualistic worship. It is cultivation of noble human qualities, righteous conduct and performance of duties without selfish motive. Being human-centric, Vedic dharma has a universal, transnational and timeless approach.

**7. Purusharth chatushtay - The Vedic goal of life:** Purusharth chatushtay means four goals that a person should aim at and strive to achieve. These are i) dharma i.e. righteous living and performance of duties ii) artha i.e. wealth and material achievement iii) kaama i.e. worldly enjoyment and iv) moksha i.e. ultimate liberation from the thralldom of material and sensory bondage. Charak says, "For achieving dharma, artha, kaama and moksha, freedom from disease is the excellent source" (*Dharmarth kaamamokshaanaam arogyam moolam uttamam. Charak Samhita, Sutrasthaanam, 1:15*). In the previous section, we have seen that Vedic scriptures advocate a balanced material (abhyudaya) as well as spiritual (nihshreyas) development. Holistic life means a rich outer as well as inner life. It needs to be emphasized that dharma or righteous living is the first goal and moksha or liberation the final goal of our life. Therefore, artha or material progress and kama or worldly enjoyments must be based on dharma so that we can enjoy a noble and rich worldly life as well as ultimate peace in liberation. Then we can live in the world a full and active life that is uninfluenced by the worldly influences just as lotus leaf is not wet by water (*Padma-patram ivaambhasaa. Bhagavatgita, 5:10*). This is the Vedic concept of jivan-mukti, that is liberation **in** and **not** from this beautiful world.

We have seen that Vedic dharma advocates a holistically rich and not abstinent lifestyle. In contrast to Buddhism, Vedic system gives exalted position to householders (grihasthaas) and not abstinent monastic class. Supremacy of grihasthashram is a wonderful and unique facet of Vedic wisdom. We have achieved much progress in science and technology. But there is monstrous level of corruption and lack of human values. This divorce between material and spiritual progress can be rectified by giving due emphasis to dharma. Without observing dharma and moral values, there cannot be peace, harmony and abundant prosperity at individual, family and social levels. Material progress and legitimate enjoyment is essential for our holistic health and happiness. When these are consistent with dharma, they bring endless glory, progress and joy. Vedic India was characterized by material as well as spiritual progress and flourishing civilizations. Vedic attitude towards wealth is different from biblical concept of money as a corrupting influence.

**8. Status of women in Vedic India:** Women have an exalted position in Vedic literature. In Vedic India, women lived enlightened, honorable, dignified, full and satisfactory lives. Hundreds of Vedic hymns are attributed to women rishikas. Gayatri mantra is considered to be of great merit. Women received good education and played important role in socio-cultural and spiritual activities. Educated and cultured women make healthy families, which are ideal units of an ideal society. As a creator of ideal society and source of knowledge, a scholarly woman is called as brahmaa (*Stree hi brahmaa babhuvitha. Rigved, 8: 33:19*). No yajna is complete without the participation of wife as one's half soul-mate (ardhaangini). She is prosperity of home (grihalakshmi) and is asked to guide family members as a queen of house (*Samraajni shvashure bhava. Rig Ved, 10: 85: 46*). Mother gets the first place of honour in samskrit quotes like "Mother,

father and teacher are like devataas" (*Maatr- devo bhava pitr- devo bhava acharya devo bhava; Maatrimaan pitrimaan achaaryavaan purusho Ved*). Ved itself is referred to as mother-like, boon-giver, worship-worthy Ved -maataa (*Stutaa mayaa varadaa Ved- maataa prachodayantaam. Atharva Ved, 19: 71: 1*). As sahastraveerya (i.e. possessing thousand heroic powers), a woman is enlivening, invincible and ever-victorious who conquers hostile enemies (*Sahastra veeryaasi saamaa jinva. Yajurved, 13:26*). In Puranic tradition, the heroic Durgaa is ever conquering like Vedic Indraani who leads as the invincible chief (*Indrani etu prathamaa ajeeta amushitaa purah. Atharvaved, 1:27:4*). Yogeshwar Krishna (Bhagavadgita, 10:34) also glorifies the divine aspects of womanhood when He says "Among women, I am the Goddesses presiding over glory (kirti), prosperity (shri),

speech (vaak), memory (smriti), intelligence (medhaa), steadfastness (dhriti) and forgiveness (kshamaa). In unequivocal terms, Manu states, "Where women are respected, there devataas reside and where they are not respected, all the efforts go fruitless" (*Yatra naaryastu poojyante ramante tatra devataa. Manusmriti 3:56*). In Yoga–Yajnavalkya, Yajnavalkya rishi, doyen among the sages and a siddhayogi teaches his wife Gaargi the secrets of yoga. In the assembly of sages, he lovingly and repeatedly addresses her with honorific spiritual titles like mahaabhaagaa, tapasvini, tapodhane, narottame, sarvajne, brahmavidaamvare, sarva–shastra–vishaarade. Unfortunately during the centuries of brutal invasions and alien rule, our magnificent women suffered suppression, violence and degradation. What a fall!

It is clear that Vedic tradition and Indian culture give exalted status to women. From the spiritual point of view, there is no gender difference at the level of soul or consciousness. Even in difficult times, blessed Mother India has produced magnificent women heroes like Jhansi Ki Rani and Chenamma as well as exalted spiritual leaders like Andaal from Tamil Nadu, Meerabai from Rajasthan, Lalleshvari from Kashmir and Akka Mahadevi from Karnataka. Karnataka itself has a tradition of thirty women vachanakaars. Our women should be proud of this legacy, maintain their dignity and not fall prey to the "modern" Western culture that commercializes every bit of women's anatomy.

**9. The holistic science of yoga:** The scientific–spiritual discipline of yoga is the most precious gem of Vedic thought and our cultural heritage. It is being practiced in India from Vedic times to the modern times in an unbroken tradition. Rigved asks us to unite our mind with the Divine in meditation (*Yunjate man ut yunjate dhiyo vipraa viprasya brihato vipashchitah. Rigved, 5: 81: 1*). By regular yoga practice, we improve our strength (*Yoge yoge tavastaram vaaje vaaje havaamahe. sakhaaya Indramootaye. Yajurved, 11:14*). Upanishads are replete with yogic concepts. Bhagavadgita (~ 3000 BC) is referred to as yoga–shastra because in its 700 verses, the term yoga occurs 105 times, while other terms related to yoga (like dhyaan, prajnaa and samaadhi) are mentioned repeatedly. In unequivocal terms, Yogeshwar Krishna declares the superiority of yogi thus: "Yogi is superior to ascetics, jnaanis and karmis. Therefore, Arjun, do thou become a yogi" (*Tapasvibhyo adhiko yogi. Bhagavadgita, 6:46*). Patanjali (~ 200 BC) codified yoga as ashtaanga (8–limbed) yoga, which is one of the six schools of Hindu philosophy, and known as Yoga Darshan.

The first two limbs of ashtaanga yoga are yam (five moral-ethical codes) and niyam (five personal disciplines) for the development of our moral, spiritual and social aspects. Third and fourth limbs are asan and pranayam, which help in our physical development and improvement of physiological functions. Fifth and sixth limbs are pratyahaar and dhaaranaa for controlling our senses and making our mind calm, alert and one-pointed. The final two limbs of dhyaan and samaadhi result in inner peace, ecstasy, super consciousness and the ultimate union of our individual consciousness with the Universal Consciousness. Clearly, the holy science of yoga is for our physical, psychological, moral-spiritual as well as social development. Vedic tradition (including yoga and ayurved) has always given importance to all the three aspects of our personality – body, mind and soul. We need food for our body, mind as well as soul. Yoga is the best method for strengthening as well as purifying all these three aspects of our personality. Then this body becomes a worthy temple of the Divine (*Deho devaalayah*) and an efficient means to achieve the Vedic goal of Purusharth chatushtay (*Sharirama–adyam khalu dharma saadhanam*). By disciplined yoga saadhanaa, we can develop our total personality in a holistic manner. The magnetic and dazzling personalities of Mahrishi Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekanand illustrate this fact.

Scientific research has shown that yogic techniques produce beneficial physiological changes and have sound scientific basis (Wallace RK. *Science*, 167: 1751, 1970; Madanmohan et al. *Ind J Physiol Pharmacol*, 36: 229, 1992). Asans and pranayams improve our physical fitness and cardio-respiratory functions. Slow, rhythmic pranayam breathing can produce an immediate and deep psychosomatic relaxation (Madanmohan et al. *The Yoga Review*, 3: 25, 1983). Yoga training not only reduces the basal anxiety level but also attenuates the increase in anxiety score in stressful situations (Malathi and Damodaran. *Ind J Physiol Pharmacol*, 43: 218, 1999). It has also been reported that transcendental meditation produces pronounced physiological changes that include decrease in oxygen consumption and sympathetic activity and desirable changes in electrical activity of the brain (Wallace et al. *Am J Physiol*, 221: 795: 1971). In studies conducted in our laboratories, we have shown that after yoga training, exercise-induced stress to cardiovascular system is less severe. This means that yoga training can enable one to tolerate more severe exercise load. Yogic relaxation techniques like shavasana and meditation may produce beneficial effects by affecting the secretion of neurotransmitters, hormones and antibodies. The result is psychosomatic relaxation, activation of body's natural defenses, stimulation of growth and repair and feeling of joy. These studies show that yoga, which is being practised in India since Vedic times, has a great potential to improve our physical fitness, mental health and overall performance.